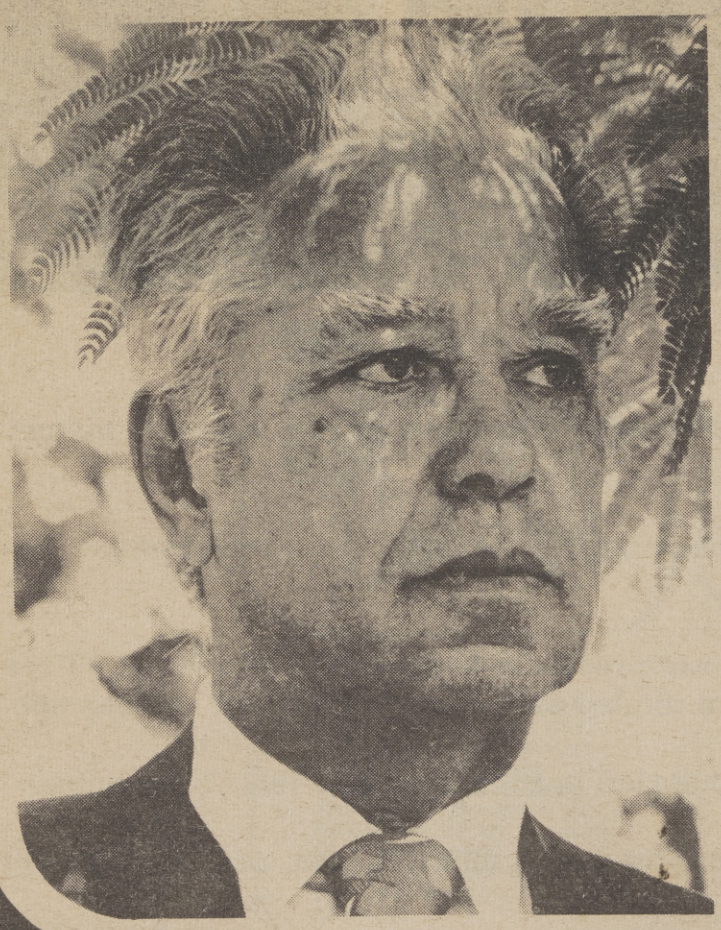
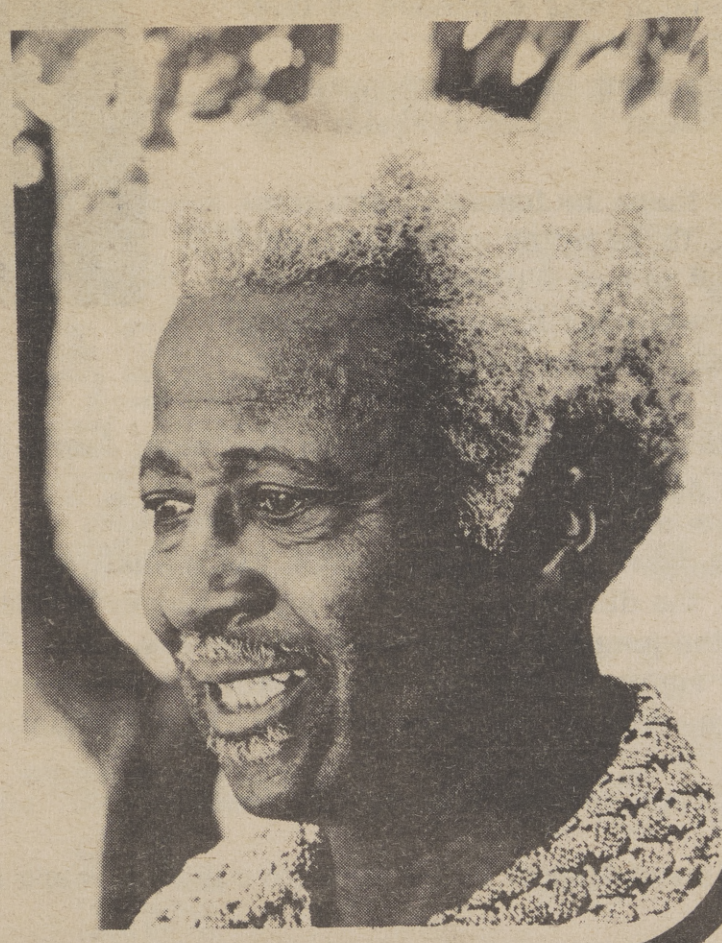
ALONG BACK

NOVEMBER , 1973





A special look at the history of Sacramento and the Black citizens who played a major role in that history.

Sacramento from 1850 to the present explored through research and interviews of over 40 leading Black Sacramentans.

The Sacramento Observer

A Look At History

The story of Black Sacramentans is as exciting and adventurous as the historical saga of the city itself.

It all began when the anchors from three small ships struck the muddy bottom of the American River. The year was 1839. And the ships were part of a leased fleet under the command of Captain John A. Sutter. Captain Sutter was a Swiss who had talked the Mexican Governments into a land grant of about 48,000 acres and a commission in the Mexican Army so he could defend his empire.

Sutter had navigated his little fleet up the Sacramento River from San Francisco and began unloading supplies at what is now the end of 28th Street.

On a small knoll not far from the anchorage, he began construction of a fort.

Sutter later established an embarcadero on the Sacramento River near the foot of I and J Streets. Grazing lands and wheat fields filled the land between the fort and embarcadero in what now constitutes the heart of Sacramento, downtown and the Capitol.

Sutter's empire, which he named New Helvetia for his homeland, was expanded by later grants and Sutter prospered.

Traffic blossomed along the Sacramento River and settlers made Sutter's colony a regular stopping place.

To accommodate them, he founded a new community, Sutterville, three miles south of the embarcadero near what is now William Land Park. Lumber was a necessity for the new community and Sutter built a saw mill on the American River near Coloma.

PUBLISHER LEE

It was here in 1848 that his construction foreman, James Marshall, turned the page in western history when he discovered gold.

The gold rush was on!

Sutter's workers deserted for the diggings, his fields were trampled and he later died penniless and embittered. Marshall, the discoverer, shared his employer's fate.

Sacramento was the jumping-off place for the 49'ers.

Of these 49'ers, approximately 1% were Black. It is not known precisely how many of the Black 49'ers were slaves or free. But, by 1850, California's Black population totaled 962, and a significant number settled in Sacramento.

The U. S. Census report of 1850, showed a "free colored" population in Sacramento of 191. This included 14 females.

Historical facts about Blacks in Sacramento during this era and the years that followed, are very sketchy, if not non-existent.

Because of the desire to know more about Blacks during this period and more recent times, THE SACRAMENTO OBSERVER decided to develop this special edition, "A Long Look Back."

Our research methods were divided into two parts.

The first part, involved the not so rewarding task of searching the library archives for information and data concerning our subject.

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The Sacramento Observer

A LONG LOOK BACK

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The Sacramento OBSERVER Cover: "A Long Look Back". Three of the people interviewed in "A Long Look Back," are shown on the front of this issue. They are, top photograph, Mrs. Dora Stepps and her grandson; Dr. Roscoe Brewer, lower left, the city's first black dentist; and Phelix Flowers, local businessman.

PUBLISHER
William H. Lee

SPECIAL EDITION EDITOR
Terris McMahan

ART STAFF
Eric Charles
Dave Erdman
Delores Fisher
Linda Reeves

SPECIAL ASSIGNMENT PHOTOGRAPHER
Dave Kahl

STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
Jack Gibbs

ADVERTISING
Bill Lee

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Martin Luther King
William Penn
A. Philip Randolph
Harriet B. Stowe

These are names we recognize in the community of men and women dedicated to peace and non-violence. Leagued with each of these leaders, there are anonymous thousands who shared, and share, their program for a better life. Something for us to remember when we reflect on the violence in the daily news. We know that violence is in all of us. Yet non-violence is surely a realizable goal. Individual men and women have achieved it. Perhaps one day nations will. Get together with your family, friends, neighbors, or co-workers to discuss the problems of violence and how you can work together to help solve them. For a helpful discussion guide and further information write: Religion In American Life, 475 Fifth Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017. Play an active role in your community and help show the way.

RIAL
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The community of God. Make it your way.

Dr. James Fisher, left, a history instructor at the University of California, Davis, and expert in Black history raps outside the OBSERVER office with Terris McMahan and OBSERVER publisher William H. Lee.

A Look At History

The research, interviews, writing and production involved in "A Long Look Back" consumed approximately 500 manhours. Many of those hours were spent by Terris McMahan, special editor of the edition, in the California State Library's California Room where many documents and artifacts from Sacramento's past are on display.

Ms. McMahan, a recent graduate from California State University, Chico, hails from Oakland, California. Delving as deeply as she has into the history of Blacks in Sacramento has made her feel "at home."

The photostatic copies of Black newspapers from 19th Century California that Ms. McMahan is shown examining, proved to be valuable resource documents.

Ms. McMahan checks the card catalog in the California State Library for a hard to find reference.

A Community Tradition

The modern Women's Civic Improvement Center Club Center located at 3555 Third Avenue in the Oak Park Area.

The Negro Women's Civic Improvement Club in their second Home For Working Girls located at 1219 X Street. They are shown meeting with another local club.

The members of the Negro Women's Civic Improvement Club as they participated in a mortgage burning ceremony in 1942. The ceremony was to celebrate the completion of payments on their Home For Working Girls, located at that time on T Street.

The Sacramento Observer

A LOOK BACK

Civic, Community & Family Leaders

MRS. VIOLA BROOKS

Someone Who Cared

Through her unselfish community and civic contributions, Mrs. Viola Brooks has proved herself to be one who cared. Few in the history of Sacramento, have contributed more to the well-being of their community

Viola M. Brooks, one of Sacramento's most active civic leaders, came to Sacramento from Missouri in 1923, arriving on a cold rainy. Sunday morning in February. She was accompanied by her three daughters, Alta Louise, Muriel Virginia, and Anita Ogelle.

A young Black woman, coming to Sacramento in the early 1920's, faced many problems. Of course, the most immediate problem, was to get housing and employment. Mrs. Brooks was luckier than most, having employment already promised her and a married brother to live with.

"Sacramento, being the Capitol City, was a drawing card," said Mrs. Brooks. "young people, young women, were coming here, and I understand they were having difficulties securing suitable places to live while seeking employment."

The train was the main mode of transportation then, and a young woman would arrive at the station, and usually inquire of the first Black person she saw, where housing could be secured. She naturally would be directed to the rooming houses which were in the lower-end of town and of "questionable character," remembered Mrs. Brooks.

This neighborhood posed several problems for the young job seekers, because, Mrs. Brooks explained: "At that time, which is not true now, beyond Sixth Street, was a questionable area for anyone. The employer would hesitate when he found where the party lived."

"Jobs were not open then to young women as they are now."

Mrs. Brooks relates, "They were not hiring Black girls as their employees. Usually, it was domestic work or cannery work that they would get," she recalls.

Mrs. Brooks came to Sacramento to work for the P. C. Dresher family, as a cook. She remained in that capacity for 5 years, until she married Fred C. Brooks of this city.

Of her early years in Sacramento, Mrs. Brooks remembers, "I was a little slow getting acquainted until I joined the Women's Monday Club. After about a year, I was accorded an office of secretary and went on to become president."

"During that time, I became more aware of Sacramento, and it's workings and of how people were coming here and having difficulties finding suitable places to live."

"I talked to the women of the Monday Club and I approached them on this subject. They thought something might be done about it, and as is usually the case, when you bring something up, you're given that subject to work on, and I was made chairman of the project."

The project, a difficult one, was to open a boarding house for working girls. "We had no funds, nothing," remembers Mrs. Brooks. "We were just empty handed." Nevertheless, the women embarked on their project in 1926, and working slowly but ardently, they raised $500 by 1933, which they deposited in a local bank. As fate would have it, the Depression came along, and during the infamous Bank Holiday, the bank closed with the Monday Club money in it.

The club went defunct and the women were left with $9 in their treasure. Mrs. Brooks recalls: "The Depression was so distressing in these parts, that no one thought of trying to raise money. It was all they could do to make a living for their families."

The churches, the clubs, every organization in the Black community, felt the Depression severely. The clubs folded, but the churches remained. The question of what to do with the money remaining in the treasurer was resolved when: "Our club members met one day and decided to divide our $9 among the three Black churches in Sacramento."

After awhile, the Depression lessened, remembers Mrs. Books, and the banks began to pay back the money. "Our committee was renamed the "Bound To Win Committee," and a new club, The Negro Women's Civic Improvement Club, N.W.C.I.C, was formed around it. The other two clubs - the Nothing Unless Good (N.U.G.), Art Club and the Sorosos Club, also merged into the N.W.C.I.C.

With the forming of the new club, "We strived after that and kept always in our minds, our idea of establishing a home for the working girl," remembers Mrs. Brooks.

By the year of 1942, the women of the NWCIC had bought their first building, a house on 19th and T Streets, and opened a women's resident charging $1 a day. Within two years, that house was paid for.

"McClellan Air Force Base came in during this time," recalls Mrs. Brooks, "and they were quick to take our women into their employ." It soon became evident that "we needed a place that was bigger and we begn looking around."

By 1949, the NWCIC had opened a new, more spacious home at 1219 X Street. It stood until 1958, when the Sacramento Redevelopment Agency purchased it as part of their redevelopment plans. "The city paid us for the property, and we decided that this time, we would build ourselves a place," recalls Mrs. Brooks.

Intent on building their own home, the women purchased a lot on Third Street and 36th Avenue, but by then there was no need for a home for working girls, recalls Mrs. Brooks. "They could live anywhere they wanted now, in the best of hotels and boarding houses. So we decided to build a center for our young instead."

Finally in 1960, the Women's Civic Improvement Center, was opened at 3555 3rd Avenue. It was a dream come true for Mrs. Brooks who for the past 40 years, has striven to see such a thing happen in Sacramento.

Though she has given of herself unselfishly in her activities in the Women's Civic Improvement Club, she also has engaged in many other religious, civic, and fraternal activities here in Sacramento.

She has been an active participant in the Community Chest drives from her early arrival here until recent years when "the infirmities of the years bore so heavily," upon her. Mrs. Brooks is now in her 87th year.

Very active in religious affairs, Mrs. Brooks became a Deaconess of the California Conference in 1942, of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and organized the California Deaconess and Stewardess Alliance which now is over 30 years old. She has been elected a delegate to the Dualrenial Conference of A.M.E. Churches three consecutive times.

An Eastern Star since the year 1924, she has served as Worhty Matron of the Adah Chapter #1 for five years, and served in several Grand offices up to the office of Grand Conductress.

Starting at the bottom when she joined, Mrs. Brooks afterwards became the State President of the California Association of Colored Women's Clubs Incorporated.

During her years of "climbing and always reaching for higher heights," she became a member of the Women's Council of Sacramento and served in several offices, her last being the chairman of a committee to write the 50-year history of the Women's Council which she called "Silhouette."

Mrs. Brooks was the first president of the Auxiliary to the Veterans of Foreign Wars in Sacramento, and now holds a life membership in the National Home, Eaton Rapids Michigan.

She also holds a life membership in the National Association of Federation of Colored Women's Club, incorporated, the Connectional Women's Missionary Society of the A.M.E. Church. One of her last feats was the organizing of the Camelia City Study Club of Sacramento, a federated club of which she is justly proud.

Mrs. Brooks has, and continues, to lead a full active life.

"Now in my closing years, I sit by my window, my bible on my lap and look out in my closing years, I sit by my window, my bible on my lap and look out over the broad expanse of time and place and recollect my many years in Sacramento. And as I gaze toward the High Sierras, my mind travels to the future generations, and I breathe a prayer for the generations yet unborn and visualize what change will be wrought in my group of people, and as I muse, I quietly breathe, 'education, education, is the answer. Preparedness for whatever the future holds. God is not dead. He sees and know all is not right with the world."

Adding emphasis, she quotes her favorite Biblical passage: "The race is not given to the swift, neither is the battle to the strong, but the one who holds out faithfully to the end, shall wear a starry crown."

MRS. VIOLA BROOKS

MRS. LEONIE BUTLER

MRS. LEONIE BUTLER

She Witnessed The Parade Of History

Since her arrival in 1912, Mrs. Butler has watched and worked as three-score-years of history unfolded in the Capitol City.

Mr. and Mrs. Edward W. Robinson, moved to Sacramento from Jacksonville, Florida, in 1906. One year later, after completing her studies at Fisk University and earning her teaching crediential, their daughter, Leonie, joined them.

In 1912, Miss Leonie Robinson married Henry Douglas Greer, moving soon after to Los Angeles. While in Los Angeles, the Greers had 3 children. Mrs. Greer and her husband eventually became estranged and in 1920, she returned to Sacramento with her children.

Sacramento hadn't changed much in her absence. Blacks could point to only a few businesses of their own including O'Rieley's Shoe Repair and the catering business of B. A. Johnson, as the most prominent.

Blacks were still restricted to the most menial of jobs and there still was a conspicious absence of Black professionals. The signs also remained, signs that read "Colored trade not solicited here," and "We reserve the right to refuse service to anyone." Very little had changed.

After settling at 715 8th Street, Mrs. Greer sought employment to support her young family. She was hired at Weinstocks as a manicurist and worked there 5 years. In 1925, she married Mr. Frederick A. Butler, and was able to leave her job and devote her time to making a home for her family.

The children went to the local school. The schools were integrated, but Black children were not allowed to participate in any of the extra curricular activities.

Mrs. Butler became incensed when her daughters were refused acceptance into the school's Girl Scouts troop, and was instrumental in having the racial restriction lifted from membership requirements.

"She enlisted the aid of Fredrick Roberts, California's first Black assemblyman and he was able to 'persuade' the Scouts to discontinue their discriminatory practices."

"Usually a gentle woman, Mrs. Butler was quick to come to bat when her children were threatened." She tried to instill in them, the values and qualities that would make them a success in later life. She warned them, that the struggle was a hard one for Black children. She also stressed that even though a Black child did not have all the advantages that white children had he must take full advantage of those available. Never, she cautioned, must they use their race as a crutch.

The Depression came in 1929, bringing with it, the soup lines and bread lines of that era. Mr. Butler worked for the post office and like all federal employees he was forced to take a 10% pay cut, however, they were fortunate enough not to be reduced to the soup lines and were able to weather years that destroyed so many others. During these years, Sacramento gained it's first Black dentist, Dr. Brewer.

World War II followed in on the heels of the Depression bringing with it a general period of posperity for Sacramento. Jobs became plentiful with the opening of McClellan Air Force Base and the reactivation of Mather Air Force Base. Everybody including Sacramento's Blacks basked in this new feeling of plenty and sagging spirits were bolstered.

The War years also witnessed a reawakening of the dreams and hopes of many of Sacramento's Blacks. After the War, in the booming years of the late 40's, and early 50's, they clung to these dreams and gradually a few began to come to realization.

Black professionals began to appear in Sacramento. Dr. Brewer came in the early Depression years, and Dr. Johnson, followed later in 1940. Soon Sacramento could point proudly to it's Black lawyers beginning with Attorney Colley, in the late 40's, and followed closely by Mrs. Butler's own son, Attorney Douglas Greer, and daughter, Attorney Lucy Amerson.

Today Mrs. Butler is a widow, her husband having passed in 1972. She has 3 grandchildren.

Through her long life, Mrs. Butler has watched from the side lines, as history paraded by. The age of accommodation gave way to the era of integration, and that too, gave way to today's militancy. Constant in all those years has remained Mrs. Leonie Robinson Butler.

MRS. GLADYS CANSON

SIMMIE FRANKLIN

A Man Of The Community

Few can look back on the World War II era and the years that followed with such clarity and insight as Simmie Franklin

Attracted by promises of warm summers and mild winters, which he thought might be beneficial to his health, Simmie Franklin moved to Sacramento from Berkeley in 1942.

The weather was indeed pleasant, but he soon discovered that even Sacramento's warm summers were not enough to breed the kind of brotherly love he had hoped for. On arriving in Sacramento, he was immediately confronted with a major problem - housing. In fact, Mr. Franklin's biggest problem as he states it, "wasn't a matter of finding a job, but of finding a house."

He remembers: "It wasn't like it is now, they wouldn't even sell you a house." The Franklins were forced to rent at a rooming house for six months. They were, however, able to secure a comfortable three bedroom house when the Japanese family who originally lived there was forced to relocate to one of the government concentration camps. The rental fee was $30 per month.

The Franklins still tried to buy their own home. Their hopes were temporarily lifted when one realtor told them, "I got a house we can sell you." But those same hopes were shattered when he added, "But I can't take you out there in the day time, I don't want the neighbors to see that I'm selling to a colored family." The Franklins refused even to consider the home under those conditions. Mr. Franklin feels that we are fortunate that today's housing situation has changed.

In 1943, Mr. Franklin was able to purchase what he feels was "the last house they were willing to sell to a Negro," located on Sloatway. He and his family lived there for a couple of years before purchasing a home on Franklin Blvd., in what he describes as "the country." They lived on Franklin for another 20 years before moving to their present address.

Mr. Franklin's next concern was employment. World War II provided the necessary rejuvination for the economy which was beginning to sag under the weight of the Great Depression. Thousands were employed around the clock in the nation's shops and factories to produce the products necessary to suport our efforts in the war. McClellan Air Base and Southern Pacific Railroad Company were two very large employers of Blacks during those years.

Mr. Franklin became one of the many hired in the Southern Pacific Shops. It was not long before he left the SP, for a more stable position with the city. He says: "I went to work for the city because I thought I might have a job for after the war."

The war, feels Mr. Franklin, radically affected the economics of Blacks in Sacramento. It created many more jobs but it also created a shortage of manpower at the same time. Employers were forced to hire anyone who could do the job and this gave Blacks a chance.

California's evacuation of its Japanese-American citizens also greatly affected the economics of Black Sacramentoens, feels Mr. Franklin. "When the Japanese were removed, Blacks had a chance to try their hands at gardening work and other trades that traditionally the Japanese had done." Many new Black businesses sprung up where once Japanese businesses had been.

Sacramento experienced one of it's most dramatic periods of population growth during World War II. Thousands came to Sacramento to work in it's factories and fields. Many of these thousands were southern Blacks, induced to make the "great migration" in hopes of bettering their conditions both economically and politically.

Mr. Franklin believes that many of the people who came here were of the "unsettled type." He believes: "people from the south who were doing good and had businesses didn't come out here." It was those who were dissatisfied with their situations and who had very little to lose by leaving who came to Sacramento during the war years.

It was these circumstances that created a potentially explosive situation when the influx of poor Blacks and poor whites began competing with each other for post-war jobs and housing.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, of which Mr. Franklin has been a member since 1920, was active in dealing with these problems and successful, to a certain extent, in "breaking down the war of prejudice." However, as Mr. Franklin sees it, the problem of the poor of both races competing with each other remains a problem today.

Mr. Franklin has held the position of membership chairman for 15 years and performed duties on the executive committee for a like number of years. He ardently believes that the NAACP is responsible to a large extent, for the progress that Blacks in Sacramento have made. He believes: "Without the NAACP we wouldn't have the opportunities we have now."

"The NAACP always worked in a persuasive way to solve problems, remembers Mr. Franklin, we didn't use any threats." He believes that Sacramento never had any major problems because it's minority population was too small to warrant any, and because the NAACP always worked on problems, "before they came to a head."

Over the years, the NAACP and Mr. Franklin has been dedicated to improving the quality of education in Sacramento schools, particularly those with a high concentration of minority students.

In 1961, Mr. Franklin retired after 30 years of service to the City of Sacramento. He and his wife, Ola, both of whom are members of United Church of Christ, in Oak Park, live quietly with their memories of the Sacramento they knew 30 years ago.

MRS. NONA HENRY

Five Generations In The City Of The Plains

Since moving here in 1902, Mrs. Henry has witnessed a city come into being. Mrs. Henry's family was one of the early residents of Sacramento

Nona Henry, one of Sacramento's early Black residents, was born in Colusa County on November 6, 1900. Her family moved to Sacramento in 1902, and one of her earliest memories are of the San Francisco earthquake in 1906 when "Things shook and dishes fell out of the cupboards."

Mrs. Henry started Lincoln Elementary school at age 5, the only Black student in her class. Because the Black population was so small there were few Black children in the school system.

Being the only Black in class was "trying" sometimes admits Mrs. Henry, especially when her mother braided her hair in corn rows or wrapped it African fashion. "The children would tease me, but my brother always came to my rescue."

Even though Sacramento's school system contained relatively few Black children, Mrs. Henry remembers with pride that there was one Black principal in the system, Mrs. Sara Jones.

The Sacramento that Mrs. Henry grew up in had very few Black businesses. Dunlap's Dining Room, was one, O'Riley's Shoe Repair Shop was another.

In 1912, Mrs. Henry's father, Robert Eugene McDonald, became one of Sacramento's first Black street sweepers. Up until then, Blacks made livings the best they could. Most worked as boot blacks, porters and in other menial service jobs. Nearly all supplimented their incomes by raising vegetables in truck farms and peddled them in town.

When the opportunity to make $3 a day as street sweepers arose, many men who had "just been scavenging" found steady jobs.

During her school years, Mrs. Henry held various after-school jobs including one washing dishes for 25 cents an hour. It was always important to "get along with people" and she was always friendly, because "maybe if the employer liked you, he gave you a little more."

Until the early 20's, the garbagemen in Sacramento had always been of Italian descent. But they became discontent with their lot, and demanded higher wages for their back breaking labor, recalls Mrs. Henry. Rather than raise their wages, the city hired Blacks at even lower wages to work their jobs instead.

Mrs. Henry remembers, "The Italians were glad to get out. The work was hard, and didn't pay much. The Blacks were glad to get in and make more money than they would otherwise. With the new jobs living conditions improved for men. They now had steady, stable jobs, something not many of Sacramento's Blacks could boast of. A job working for "the city" became a status elevator and a new Black social class was created in Sacramento.

One of Sacramento's most celebrated traditions, was born of these events. The "Garbagemen's Picnic." The annual picnic was a much looked forward event which drew people from as far away as Los Angeles.

"The men took pride in scrubbing their trucks and hauling the children in them to the picnic grounds in Del Paso Heights or Folsom."

In 1917, Mrs. Henry married. That same year, war was declared, plunging America in the middle of World War I. Blacks were drafted as well as whites remembers Mrs. Henry. "There was a sign with Uncle Sam pointing and saying 'I Want You," -- didn't look like he was pointing at whites only."

World War I, was very hard on Blacks in Sacramento. Rationed food was scarce and work was extremely hard to find, "just like now," recalls Mrs. Henry. These conditions contributed to making matters worse when the great Influenze Epidemic broke out.

"Everybody suffered behind the flu," recalls Mrs. Henry. Food was rationed and people didn't have enough to eat. Hot toddies and ginger was used to treat the flu, sometimes to no avail.

Mrs. Henry remembers: "The death wagon would drive up and down the streets and pick up one body here, and two there." The epidemic finally eased leaving Sacramento a stunned and weakened city.

ratified, bringing in the era of prohibition. Sacramento was not a large urban area, but like many other cities it engaged in the illegal alcohol trade.

One night, the gravity of the prohibition was forcibly brought home to Mrs. Henry, when she and a group of other youngsters decided to visit a local Black night spot that had recently opened. "No sooner than we got in and sat down, the feds broke in and scared us half to death." Needless to say, the party of youngsters left hurriedly and never returned.

The coming of the depression brought little change in Blacks lives, believes Mrs. Henry. "Looks to me like I'd been depressed all alone." She admits: "Poor families have always been depressed" Where times were difficult, they became worse. However the depression years "weren't so bad," recalls Mrs. Henry, "because I got some apple pie."

Mrs. Henry remembers mentioning to a friend one depression day, that she wished more than anything, that she had an apple pie. When she returned home that evening, two of the "most beautiful pies" she had ever seen sat upon her porch. She never knew who left them there, but whenever she thinks of the depression years, she remembers those pies.

When World War II started in 1941, McClellan Air Force Base had been in operation for 2 years. During the war years, it became a center of war related production, hiring thousands to work in it's shops.

McClellan had a very high employee turn-over, their hiring and firing process was so rapid, "they hired you in one door and fired you out another one," recalls Mrs. Henry.

Mrs. Henry went to work for McClellan in 1942 as a custodial matron and remained there 10 years, eventually gaining the responsibility of supervising three mechanic lines.

If it was necessary to place a temporal divider somewhere in Sacramento's history between 1902 when Mrs. Henry's family came to Sacramento, and today to mark Sacramento's most significant period of changes, it would fall in the late 40's.

"That is when things in Sacramento really began to change. That is when thousands of Blacks from the Southern states poured into Sacramento," says Mrs. Henry.

"Many of these people came here expecting everything to be different from down south, but it was still prejudice here, just like everywhere else," she recalled.

Today, Mrs. Henry lives in Oak Park in a neighborhood her family has lived in since 1913. She recalls when her father first decided to move there. Her mother thought it was too far out from the "city" but her father liked the idea of living outside of town, so that he could raise some of his own food.

Oak Park was a thinly populated rural area then. There was very few whites living here in 1913, when Mrs. Henry's family moved here, and fewer still Blacks. When Mrs. Henry married in 1917 she moved to Oak Park also.

For the children there were other advantages to living in Oak Park. Today's McClatchy park was an amusement center fittingly named Joy Land. Joy Land offered rides and games and outdoor shows with many local talents.

Today Mrs. Henry is retired. She lives on the same block that her family has lived on for the last 60 years. On that land the roots of 5 generations extend. Mrs. Henry has one daughter, 3 grandchildren, 13 great grandchildren, and 3 great great grandchildren.

She is a member of the Daughters of the Elks, Camillia Temple #831, a member of the Courts of Colanthes #9, an auxiliary of the Knights of Pythias, and a member of the Ella Mills chapter of the Eastern Star #59.

MRS. LAVATER LEFTRIDGE

I Came As A Child

Though many years have passed. Mrs. Leftridge still cherishes her childhood memories of Sacramento

When Mrs. Lavater Leftridge, one of Sacramento's first Black beauticians arrived in Sacramento more than 50 years ago, she was only 9-years-old. Even at that young age, Sacramento looked like nothing more than "a little hick town" to her.

The tree lined streets which had impressed so many others with their bucolic splendor left only the impression of "countryness" on Mrs. Leftridge.

Like so many newcomers to Sacramento, Mrs. Leftridge and her family lived with relatives until they could find housing for themselves. Like so many of Sacramento's "old timers," the Leftridge's relatives lived in the lower end.

The Black population at that time was very small. "You practically knew everybody by name. You could count the people on your hand," remembers Mrs. Leftridge.

The church was the cornerstone of the Black community, providing it with social activities as well as religious worship. Mrs. Leftridge remembers Shiloh Baptist Church, one of Sacramento's few Black churches at that time, as being little more than, "a small 3 or 4 room house." Today the church is the largest Black church in Sacramento.

She recalls: "Mother sent us children to church several Sundays, and we always came back and said we couldn't find it. Finally, she took us herself. We didn't know that was the church, we thought it was just a house."

In correspondence perhaps, with the small size of the Black population, the number of Black businesses also was very small.

Soon after her arrival, Mrs. Leftridge was enrolled into Lincoln Elementary School, which she refers to as "the melting pot on 4th and R.

The well-integrated student body was composed of Chinese, Japanese, Mexicans, Filipinos, Italians, Blacks and Whites. Mrs. Leftridge recalls that each group played separately, speaking their own language on the playground.

From the lower end, Mrs. Leftridge and her family moved to the Fruitridge area where she was raised and continues to live now. She delights in describing the Fruitridge area before it was discovered by the shopping centers: "It was nothing but fields. There was a few scattered houses but nothing like you see now."

Mrs. Leftridge remembers a certain amount of freedom and convenience in the open fields.

She used to be able to take a short-cut through one field to get home and she remembers her anger as a child when an aviation school was built there. "Whenever the airplanes were out and they were practicing, I used to get so mad 'cause then I had to go the long way."

Mrs. Leftridge was living in the Fruitridge area when the depression struck. She recalls that she wouldn't have noticed the difference in their depression-time lifestyles, if it were not for the shortage of meat.

During the depression, more things were hard to get than just a good cut of meat. Jobs were almost impossible to find. The squeeze was not felt nearly as much by Blacks.

Being the oldest of three children, Mrs. Leftridge was forced to discontinue her education and find employment. She joined her mother at the cannery, and worked occasional stints at other seasonal work.

The occupations that a young Black girl could pursue during this time, was limited to day work, cannery work, or catering. Mrs. Leftridge worked as a caterer for a short while. Ethel Strickland, Dora Stepps and George Dunlap were some of the prominent names in the catering business at that time.

In the mid-'30's, Mrs. Leftridge entered beauty culture school completing her training in 1937, and opening the Leftridge Beauth Salon in Oak Park. She was the third Black beautician in town and her business was well received in Sacramento. Mrs. Leftridge sold her business to one of her operators in the early 60's.

In 1950, Mrs. Leftridge tried her hands at still another business. She and her husband opened the Orange Villa on Stockton Boulevard.

"The Orange Villa was quite unusual for its time," believes Mrs. Leftridge. "It offered dancing, cocktails, billiards and Mrs. Leftridge's special southern fried chicken. Many Sacramentans remember it as a club that was just far enough outside of town to "make you really want to party."

Today the Orange Villa is known as the Chicken Villa.

Several years ago, an advertisement agent suggested that Mrs. Leftridge make some mention of the chicken served there by coining a new name for her establishment.

Mrs. Leftridge runs the Villa alone now. Its heyday has passed, the crowds are not as large as they used to be. It is hard work, but Mrs. Leftridge is a fighter and she remains. She has retained one habit from her youth, and that is her regular attendance at Sunday worship.

Twenty-five years ago, Mrs. Leftridge was among a small group who helped found the Oak Park United Congregational Church of Christ. She remembers that their first pastor, Rev. Theodore Dunlap, held services in her home for a year before the church was able to move to a more permanent location on Fourth Avenue. Today, she is one of the church's charter members.

Mrs. Leftridge had two children, a daughter deceased and a son.

FREDDIE MARTIN

In Search Of The Golden City

As a young man, Fred Martin had always heard tales about how good life was in Sacramento. Finally in 1921, he decided to come see for himself. After he got here, he stayed and loved it

Lured by tales of plentiful work and good wages, Fred Martin came to Sacramento in 1921, from Seattle, Washington.

He had debated making the move for some time. Friends who had gone to California, praised enthusiastically, the weather, wages and the people.

Others came back with a completely different story. They warned against going to California. "If you're not a native son, you can't make it."

After listening for two years, Fred Martin decided to see for himself. He found his reception by Blacks to be "chilly" but was undaunted.

Unlike many newcomers, Martin did not have difficulty finding housing.

He stayed with a private family.

He remembers that his other choices for housing would have been in the lower-end.

The Black population in 1921, was small, many Black families lived in the lower-end. Many others were scattered about the city and it's outskirts.

Martin found Sacramento to be more discriminatory than Seattle, and was thankful that he did not have to seek public accommodations. Martin can't recall seeing any signs but he remembers that it was "understood" that Blacks did not go to the white hotels and establishments.

Racial discrimination was a way of life in Sacramento. and "most people didn't need signs, recalls Martin. "You were alright as long as you stayed in your place."

"If you weren't a janitor or shoe shiner, there wasn't much you could do to earn a living," said Martin. Black men were just starting to be garbage men, and was one of the few well-paying jobs.

As dismal as the job market was, jobs were always open for Black women. They worked as maids, cleaning women in commercial businesses and window dressers for some of the downtown stores.

Martin has observed that in a city that was prejudice, the Black women always had an easier time finding employment than men. He does not really know why it is so, but he sees the Black women of today being played against the Black man in affirmative action programs.

One of the few Black clubs in Sacramento, was "Way out on Stockton Boulevard." Even though the name has slipped his memory, Martin remembers that one of his neighbors was a musician there.

Another popular club was the Eurika Club, owned at one time by Will Snow and later by Charles Derrick. Several barbers were counted among the local Black businessmen. One successful barber had a nine chair shop on Commercial Avenue.

Martin stayed in Sacramento for two years, married and returned to Seattle. During the next 19 years, he traveled up and down the coast of California opening a shop in Merced and another in Maderia.

In 1941, Sacramento beckoned, and Martin returned moving from Nevada and opening his own shop on 7th and P Streets.

On his return, he found things pretty much the way they had been. The church was still the focal point of most peoples' lives, with Sunday programs, socials and picnics. Also since the advent of the Black garbage man in Sacramento, the annual Garbage Men's Picnic, had become the social event of the year. It's old fashioned country fair atmosphere attracted people from northern and southern California.

Soon after Martin's second return, World War II started, creating the biggest people boom Sacramento had ever seen. Martin believes that many well educated and skilled people came to Sacramento and began demanding better jobs and more opportunities. "The progress that newcomers made affected everybody," said Martin. Blacks migrated to Sacramento because they discovered that, "south of here, all you could do was pick cotton."

The increasing Black population made demands on the existing businesses and subsequently, new Black businesses sprung up. Black beauty shops, tailor shops, restaurants, and others, opened to fill the demand for these services.

Americans fed on hysteria, of a possible Japanese attach, during the early days of the war. Fred Martin remembers with a little humor how certain individuals tried to capitalize on this hysteria. "A feller came to my shop trying to sell me some black-out curtains, and in an attempt to really sell me, he told me with my black-out curtains on the windows, if the Japanese attacked, I could go right on cutting hair and wouldn't have to stop. I told him he must be crazy."

Most Blacks didn't feed on the fear of the Japanese attacking, because according to Martin, that was a white preoccupation, "they (the whites), had more to loose," said Martin.

In 1944, Martin bought his present home in Oak Park. There were no Black realtors then, and if a Black person wanted to buy, he recalls, "The realtor would take you to Del Paso Height, if that didn't suit you, he would take you to Oak Park, and if that didn't suit you, they had to see you later."

Martin recalls the experience of a friend who picked out a house that he wanted to buy, but when he approached the realtor, he advised him to "pick a block that had colored living on it," and he would be glad to sell to him."

"Many marvel that such conditions existed for Blacks in the State Capitol," but it must be kept in mind, says Martin, "that before the war, there was no community to speak of, just a handful of Black families. The told timers were limited as to the amount of money they could make and what they could buy."

Some Black parents did not encourage their children to seek higher education simply because they felt that a college educated Black still could not advance any further than they had with their minimal education.

Most children attended grammar school, a few completed it and went to high school. Fewer completed high school and went to college.

Martin sees some progress being made in Sacramento, more than in a lot of the smaller west coast towns. He attributes it to a larger and better educated Black population which is able to exert pressure on the existing system.

J.R. SMITH

MRS. DORA STEPPS

She Got Involved

Dora Stepps, one of the city's early Black businesswomen, has been a resident of Sacramento since 1918, when her family moved here from Stockton, California.

Usually, the first concern of any newcomer. is finding housing for himself and his family.

"This was a very difficult task for most Blacks," remembers Mrs. Stepps.

"We didn't have any problem. We were extremely fair, some people said we were half-white and more doors were open to us," she relates.

Her step-father, Oswald Hall. built his family an attractive home on Vallejo Way remembers Mrs. Stepps, and the family settled down to become active in Sacramento affairs.

"We were active in everything, because there was only a few Black peohere," stated Mrs. Stepps.

Hall, an active member of the NAACP, was also the personal friend of many emminent Blacks of that era. The late W. E. B. DuBois was entertained many times at the Stepp's family home as well as the famous virtuouso, Roland Hayes.

There is one incident involving Roland Hayes that stands out in her memory because of the smile that it evokes. She and her sisters decided to entertain their guest by taking him for a ride in the family car.

In their excitement, they forgot to check the gasoline supply, and as fate would have it, in the middle of the ride, they ran out of gas.

"That wouldn't have been so bad," recalls Mrs. Stepps, "if our famous guest hadn't been called upon to help push the car."

Mrs. Stepps mother, an activist in her own right, is credited with the removal of a racially offensive book from the public school shelves. "The book was called the 'Pickanniny'," remembers Mrs. Stepps, "and whenever it was read in class, the white children would snicker and that didn't make the Black children feel good. Mother organized a group of concerned women and they had the book taken off the shelves."

The church, because of it's importance as a social institution as well as a religious one, looms large in Mrs. Stepps memories.

The membership of Shiloh Baptist Church, the church that her family belonged to, could not afford to pay their pastor a salary so it engaged in fundraising activities to raise money for his living expenses. In the meantime, the minister alternated, staying with different families until he was housed permanently.

"As kids, we used to get so disgusted when the minister stayed at our house, because that meant we had to wait on him," said Mrs. Stepps.

In 1918, America was struck by the Great Influenza attack. California was one of the last states struck by this nationwide epidemic and one of the "hardest struck," according to Mrs. Stepps.

"The whole city was infected," she recalls.

"Whole familes were dying and the hospitals were so small they couldn't handle it."

In desperation, many home practitioners used their own remedies, the city also encouraged the wearing of masks on the streets and in public places.

Sacramento, in it's early years, had been plagued by fires and floods but the Influenza Epidemic of 1918, was a new and more frightening variable.

"The city pulled together to help each other, Black and white," remembers Mrs. Stepps.

No family was left untouched by an influenza caused death. One family that Mrs. Stepps cared for, was left with only one surviver out of ten.

For awhile, Mrs. Stepps worked at the County Hospital along with a few other Black women. However her father refused to let her return to her job when she was denied the use of the cafeteria because she was Black.

In 1919, she married young Fred Stepps and they immediately embarked upon a booming trucking business. The young couple owned a trucking company of four large trucks and the same year of their marriage, they secured a contract with the City of Sacramento, becoming one of the 21 companies contracted to participate in the City's garbage removal service.

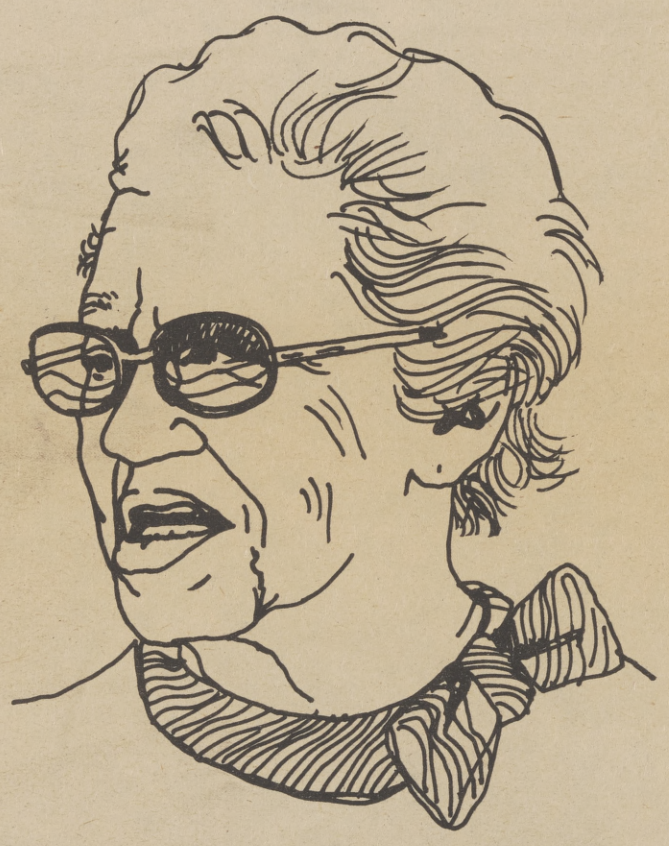
The Stepps ran their trucking company successfully for 41 years. In 1961. Stepps passed away. Mrs. Stepps continued to run the business alone until 1961, when she retired.

Mrs. Stepps has also made a name for herself as a caterer beginning in that business soon after her marriage. Sacramento's most prominent citizens were counted among her cliental.

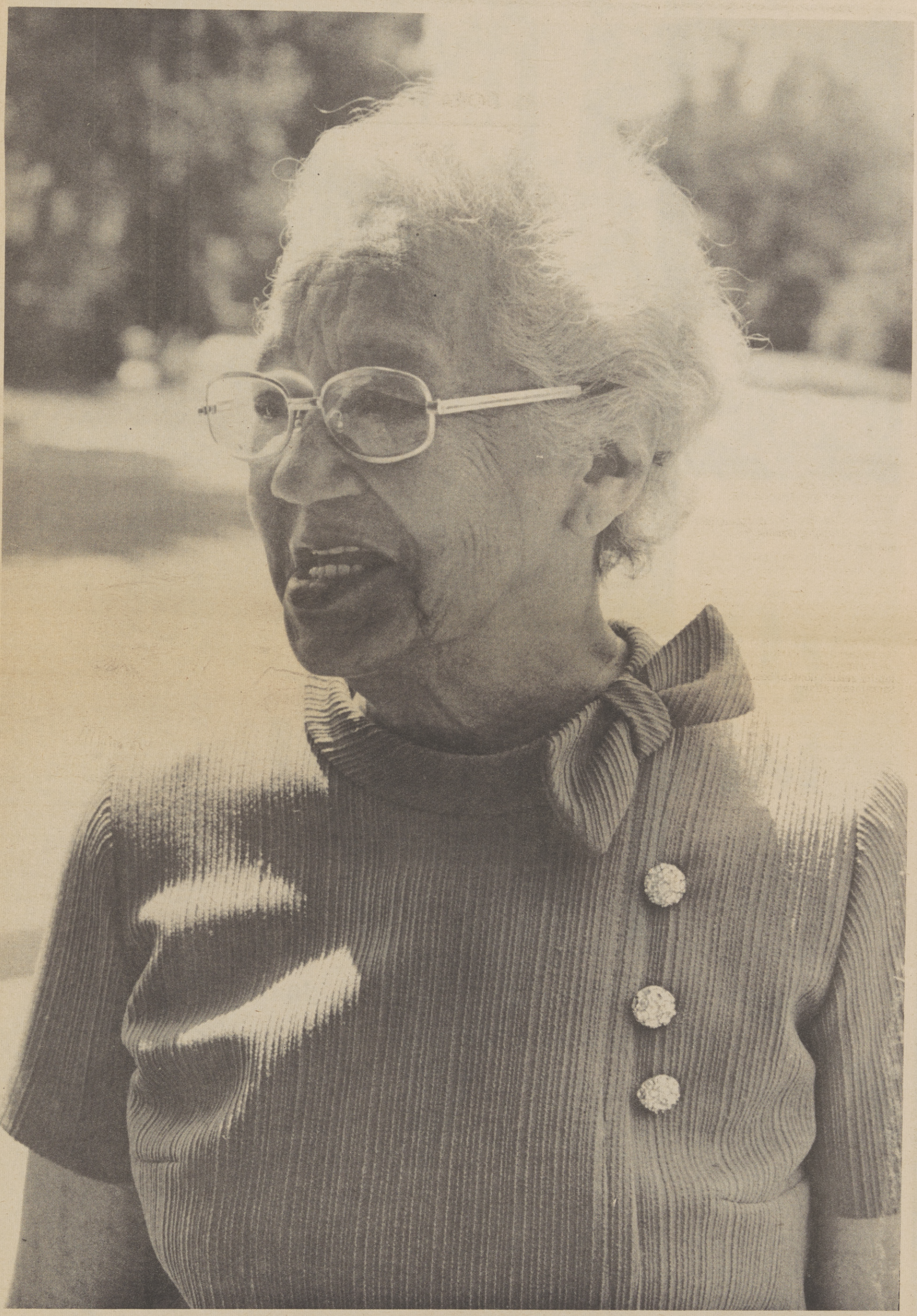
Another successful business endeavor can be accounted to the Stepps - the Delux Auto Garage, the first Black owned auto garage in Sacramento. The garage operated for many years, but in 1958, it was destroyed by fire. Mrs. Stepps barely escaped with her life, and never rebuilt it.

Mrs. Stepps has been retired for the past 12 years and enjoying every minute of it. Diminutive in size, she never-the-less finds an amazing number of jobs to tackle. Today, in her early 70's, she has taken on the task of raising her 2-year-old grand child.

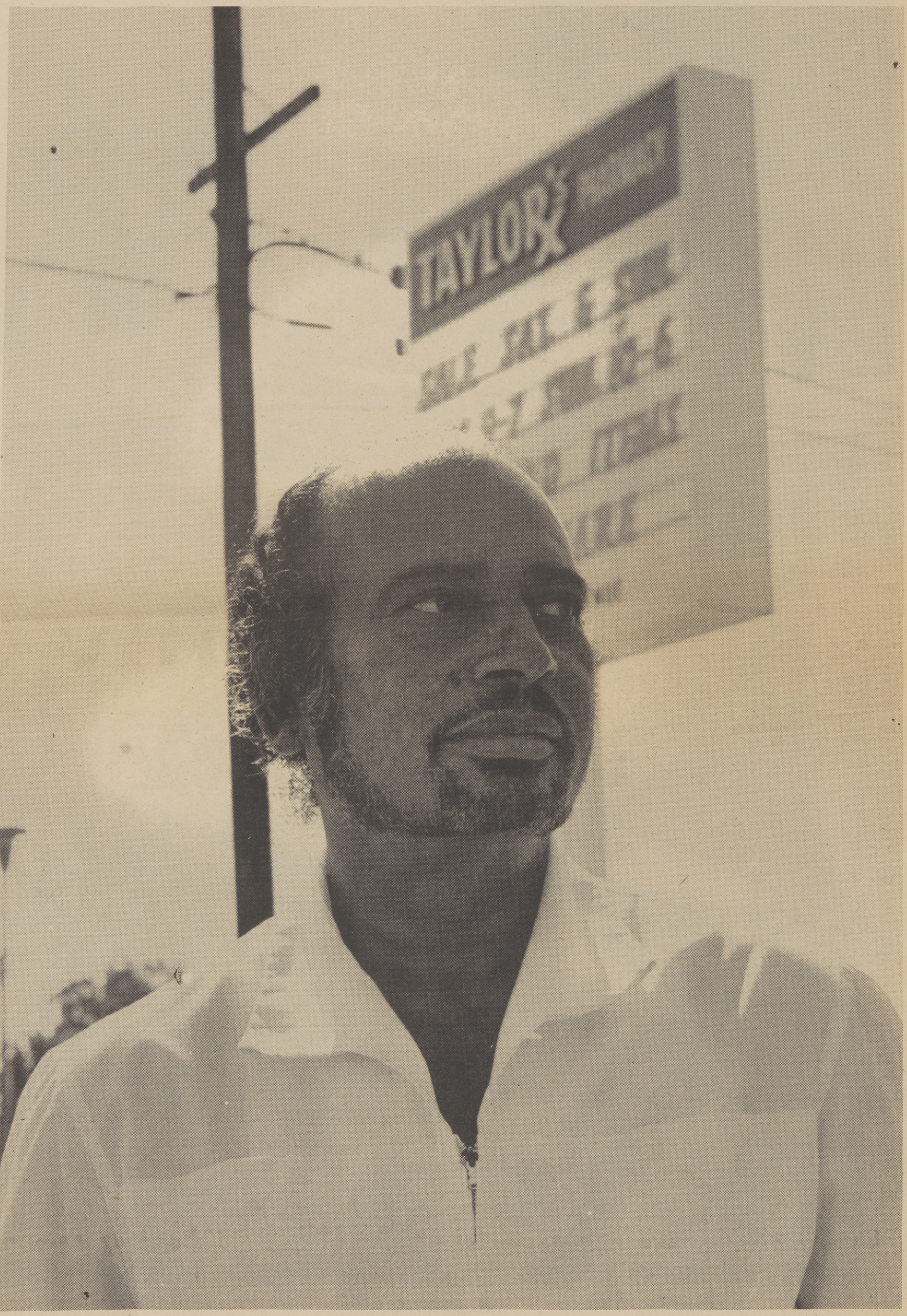
Looking back over her early years in Sacramento, Mrs. Stepps sees that "lots of things have changed." There seems to be lot more opportunities for everyone. "We made some progress," she says, "but the young folks are still fighting for change."



Mrs. Stepps has long been active in local events to benefit the community, participated and given her all: a sure formula for success



MRS. DORA STEPPS



DR. DANIEL TAYLOR

DR. DANIEL TAYLOR

The Family Pharmacist

In 1942, the young pharmacist, Daniel Taylor, chose Sacramento as the perfect city to raise a family. He established what was to become the only Black owned pharmacy

"I picked Sacramento in 1943 as a bedroom city in which to raise a family. That's all I wanted out of it and it served my purpose well," so states Dr. Dan Taylor, Sacramento's first Black pharmacist.

After taking the California Board Examination in 1943, Dr. Taylor came to Sacramento that same year and opened Taylor's Pharmacy at Sixth and Capitol Ave. "I had no difficulties in finding a business, but in finding a residence, race played a strong factor."

Dr. Taylor's search for housing turned into one long nightmare. He recalls "I spent several weeks, traveling by trolly, gas was rationed, looking for a place. It was a sad experience. I was so disappointed in California I was ready to leave the United States.

The one encouraging thing about Dr. Taylor's sombering experience was the help he received from some of Sacramento's older Black residents. Wiser in the ways of Sacramento, they helped him in eventually finding a place.

Taylor's Pharmacy at Sixth and Capitol Ave. was located in the heart of the lower end, one of Sacramento's "roughest areas" as Dr. Taylor describes it.

The lower end had been a flourishing red light district but with the coming of WWII, the military authorities from McClellan forced Sacramento to "clean it up" by threatening to put the whole citv off limits, he related.

"The open houses closed but the characteristics remained the same," remembers Dr. Taylor. Lest it be inferred otherwise, the lower end was not inhabited entirely by shady characters, but was the home of many conventionally employed Blacks.

to patrol the area. Through an agreement with the area merchants and the city, the military began to patrol the area. "They would patrol in pairs with four men available as back-up in case they ran into trouble."

The streets were lined with large, beautiful trees. But in the autumn when the leaves began to fall they just lay there, piling as high as three feet in some places and decomposing.

The leaves piled so high they began to block the entrance ways to some businesses. When Dr. Taylor called the city to inquire why the streets were not being swept, their reply was "We don't bother with the lower end."

Through all this Taylor's Pharmacy remained constant with it's atmosphere and personality of an "old fashioned drug store." It was a gathering place for the locals, people could always "bump" into friends there. It was a land mark and the first place a stranger was directed for information. "Meet you at Taylor's" was a phrase well used in the west end.

In the early 50's, Sacramento began to take an interest in the lower end and some of the conditions that prevailed there. The Sacramento Redevelopment was formed and a major renewal program was launched. In 1956 Taylor's Pharmacy was purchased by the Sacramento Redevelopment Agency as part of their redevelopment plans. Dr. Taylor gave up private practice and for the next 5 years worked as a pharmacist for the state of California.

In 1961 he opened the new Taylor's Pharmacy on Grand Avenue in Del Paso Heights.

Dr. Taylor says: "I never thought of my business as a Black business -- just as a business." Still, he stocks many products appealing primarily to a Black market. Many of the hair preparations and cosmetics sold there cannot be found anywhere else in the city.

For the last 10 years, his wife, Margarite, who has been with him his whole career and who knows almost as much about the business as he does, has become very involved in the family business.

The Taylors have three children, his son Daniel, joined his father as manager of the family business after his graduation from college this year.

MR. & MRS. MARSHALL THOMAS

MR. & MRS. MARSHALL THOMAS

They Believed In Doing Things 'Step-By-Step'

The Marshall Thomases did not always have it easy in their business. They were hard-working and possessed a strong ability to 'stick it out'. It paid off

Marshall Thomas, a successful businessman has lived in Sacramento for 31 years.

Today, he and his wife live in a comfortable home on a tree-lined street in the South Land Park area.

It was a long ardous trip from their residence on Santa Cruz Way, to their present newly built home.

The Thomases have traveled that trip, slowly, one step at a time. It was long, it was difficult, it took them over 30 years, but never once did they think of turning back.

Now they have earned their success and their cance to rest and remember.

The Thomas's came to Sacramento in 1942, from Vallejo, Calif. The climate was pleasant and they thought "opportunities" would be better here. They also wanted to buy some property, perhaps a small family business, and there was just no property to be bought in war-time in Vallejo.

"We came up on a weekend and spent a week looking for a place," remembers Thomas.

Mrs. Lulu Thomas doesn't like remembering back then. She feels "It was terrible then," and best forgotten.

Thomas agrees, that the times were difficult, but he cannot forget them.

He remembers looking for a home in a city that was "sick with racism."

He remembers finally finding a home and paying the deposit only to have it returned the next morning by the owner after the white neighbors refused to live next door to a Black family.

He felt at that time, that Sacramento indeed, was a "hard place for a Black person to buy a home and settle down in."

The Thomases also remember the warmth and concern that many Black Sacramentans showed them.

Mrs. Netta Sparks was instrumental in their eventually finding a place. It was she who introduced them to one of Sacramento's Black real estate brokers, who successfully secured property for the Thomas' on Santa Cruz Way in Oak Park.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Thomas tried to protect their children and shield them, as much as they could, from the hostility that they themselves faced.

They did not bring them with them that first week in Sacramento.

"We never told them what we had to go through," said Mrs. Thomas.

After staying in Sacramento one week, and purchasing their property, the Thomas's returned to Vallejo.

It was not until the next year of 1943, that they returned with their children to make Sacramento their home.

The neighborhood that they moved into, was predominatly white, and very hostile towards the Marshall's "intrusion."

Mrs. Thomas remembers many little incidences involving her family and it's neighbors. One such incident sticks out, perhaps as much for the smile it evokes as anything.

Mrs. Thomas remembers, "my daughter was watering the lawn and a group of neighborhood children lined up and began chanting "nigger, nigger, nigger." After telling them to go away once, the child quickly cooled what might have grown into a heated exchange, by calming turning the hose on them.

Mrs. Thomas recalls she "raised sand" over the incident. But through countless other "incidents," they kept on and "stuck it out."

Thomas attributes their ability to "stick it out" to the fact that they were working hard. He also added, "it wasn't anything new."

Thomas was employed at Mare Island in Vallejo, and continued to work there communting every day.

Mr. and Mrs. Thomas revealed that during the war there was so much work available in Sacramento that the canneries and factories would rent trucks and drive the streets recruiting workers.

In 1944, Thomas stopped commuting and began work at Sacramento's Army Depot. He remained there until he retired from his duties as packaging and process inspector in 1966.

Sacramento's Black population was on a steady climb upward. With the upsurge in population, came the demand for more Black oriented business.

In 1944, Mrs. Thomas attempted to meet some of those needs by going into the cosmetology busines. She opened Thomas's House of Beauty in a small shop attached to her home.

Becoming a business women did not mean neglecting the family. Mrs. Thomas continued to "sew and can" to make ends meet.

The Thomas's have always believed in doing things "step by step." And in 1951, they bought the commercial property at 3325, 3327, and 3329 Sacramento Boulevard.

"It was just an old building and a few mudholes," recalls Thomas.

Today, 29 years later, that property houses The Wig Emporium, Thomas's House of Beauty and Tommy's Barber Shop, respectively.

Mrs. Thomas remembers when she ran the beauty shop there and Mr. Thomas worked at the Army Depot and managed a variety-supply shop next door.

"Every morning we would leave the house at 6:50 a.m., and Mr. Thomas would take me to the shops and check and see if everything was OK, then he would go to his job," Mrs. Thomas revealed.

Most of Thomases whole career was spent on 2 jobs, the Army Depot, and his own business.

"Lots of people don't know me because I had a job and took care of the odds and ends of the business," Mrs. Thomas said.

The Thomases had no formal business training, but they attribute their success to a lot of hard-work and the willingness to do things "step by step," and with "thoughts to the future."

The Thomases have 4 children. Their son, Arnell, is the owner and manager of Tommy's Barber Shop at the family business location.

They are both retired now, and live quietly in an area where Marshall Thomas used to hunt pheasant years ago.

VINCENT "TED" THOMPSON

VINCENT 'TED' TOMPSON

From Mechanic To Businessman

Vincent "Ted" Thompson, came to Sacramento at the beginning of World War II, as a young mechanic. He liked what he saw, and decided to stay. He later built a mortuary business, second to none in the city

Vincent Theodore "Ted" Thompson, owner of Thompson's Funeral Home, came to Sacramento from New York, in 1941.

With the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, the United States was thrust into the country's World War II. It's state-side military installations became bustling centers of productivity demanding the cream of the nation's raw material and the best of the labor market.

McClellan Air Force Base, the major west Coast Air Base and supply station, recruited skilled workers from across the nation.

Among the workers recruited late in 1941, was a young landing gear mechanic from New York, Vincent Theodore "Ted" Thompson.

Thompson was one of thousands of Blacks who were to eventually find their way to Sacramento during the war years, and the "exploding '50's."

Like so many Blacks before him, Thompson found housing in the lower-end or west-end. The area, according to Thompson extended from Front Street to Sixth, where the greatest number of Blacks lived.

The lower-end had once been the "birth place of Sacramento," the heart of the city since it's birth in 1848. Situated on the river, the lower-end gave one easy access to that day's mode of transportation, when the main highways were still our waterways, recalls Thompson.

Gradually with the introduction of reliable street-car transportation, wealthier residents began to move to more distant settlements leaving the lower-end to the elderly who could afford the low rents, and Blacks who were denied access to other areas.

Many of the once stately homes became rooming houses much like the one Thompson found housing in.

"The west - end," remembers Thompson, "was a pleasant place to live and the people all were very desirable."

It was not, Thompson recalls, until the war started to draw to an end and the population began to increase noticibly, that the "quality" of life in the lower-end began to deteriorate.

Of course, Thompson knew why such a large percentage of the Black population lived in the lower-end - it was almost impossible to buy or rent elsewhere in the city.

It was a year-and-a-half after his arrival before he was able to purchase a home.

"I was here about four months before I went out house hunting. I looked at 126 houses before I found one that the owner was willing to sell to me," Thompson recalled.

Gas was rationed and his house hunting was done mostly on foot. At times, he experienced an almost overwhelmingly sense of discouragement but he "stuck it out," and eventually was able to buy a home on Santa Cruz Way in Oak Park.

"At that time," recalls Thompson, "there was only three streets in Oak Park with any substantial number of Black residents. They were 38th Street between 4th, and 3rd, Bigler Way and 42nd Street."

Oak Park, a "community of friendly working people," could boast the only community shopping center besides the downtown one. Residents enjoyed the convenience of shopping at Oak Park businesses on 35th Street, all within walking distance of their homes.

"There was some job discrimination," recalls Thomspon, "but Oak Park can be credited with giving several of our young men their very first job opportunities."

In 1945, Thompson decided to become one of Sacramento's few Black businessmen. He enrolled in a San Francisco Academy to study Mortuary Science. Few Blacks businesses existed at the time. Most Blacks were still struggling in lower level employment.

"A few were employed by the city in it's waste removal department. The post office employed one or two as clerks and carriers," Thompson said.

"Sacramento could boast of only one Black nurse, and one Black woman worked in the telephone company," though he jests, "nobody knew she was Black except for herself, the person who hired her, and the rest of the Black community."

In 1947, after completing his mortitian studies successfully, Thompson became a licensed embalmer.

In 1948, after returning to Sacramento, he opened Thompson's Funeral Home, at 1411 Seventh Street, and for 16 years, remained the only Black licensed embalmer in Sacramento County.

For ten years, Thompson's Funeral Home did a successful business at it's location on Seventh Street. In 1957, Thompson was forced to move, giving up his site for a state parking lot. He relocated to his present site on Fifth Avenue in Oak Park.

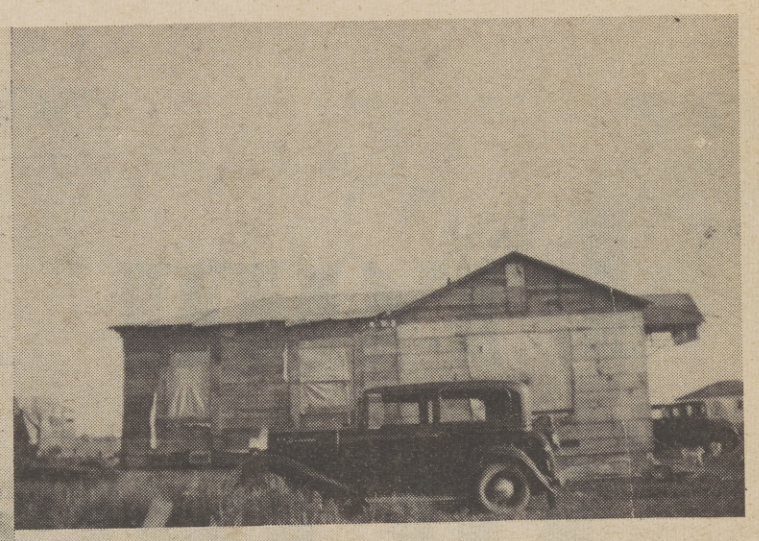
At this second location, Thompson built a new building from the ground up. He was, in fact, the third Black funeral establishment in the State of California to attempt such a comprehensive building project.

Looking back over his 32 years in Sacramento, Thompson has seen many changes, particularly in the social and political conditions of Blacks.

"When I came, Blacks were a small entity and had no power. Now they have grown and with our growth, came increasing power and recognition of political responsibility."

Thompson is a card carrying musician, and a toast master extraordinaire. He and his wife, Beatrice, who helps him in his work, have no children.

"I decided to make Sacramento my home for the rest of my life in the early '40's, and my sentiments have not changed," states Thompson.



A Look At History..

(Continued From Page LL- 2)

The second part, consisted of interviewing a group of 41 selective elderly Black Sacramentans who were encouraged to reminiscence about their earlier years and the years of their families in the city. They cover a period of 80-years, spanning from 1892 to the present.

Of course, there were some flaws in our second method. The most evident being the occasional "fogginess" some of our subjects experienced when trying to remember dates. Or the difficulty we sometimes had when trying to place events in their proper sequence several years after their occurrence.

In some of our interviews, dates may overlap or names may be forgotten, but "the flavor of the times remains."

In all, 50 prospects were contacted for interviews. Three refused because of illness, one of the three later passing. Another six refused for various reasons -- two because they were 'camera shy' and refused the accompanying photos.

On the whole, we had excellent response and fine cooperation.

The 41 people we talked with deserve the highest of praise for sharing their life histories with us. Thus, shedding much light on Black History in the city.

We would also like to express our thanks to Dr. James Fisher of the University of California, Davis, for his kind assistance in this project. Dr. Fisher made available to us, his unpublished thesis entitled "Black Californians: A History of the Political Development of The Black Community in California, 1850 to 1950."

Thanks must also go to James E. Henly of the Sacramento Historic Landmark Commission for his assistance.

Lastly, the development of this special would not have been possible were it not for the hard work of the staff of THE SACRAMENTO OBSERVER, whom I must say did a superb job. Particular praise should go to Ms. Terris McMahan, editor for this special edition. She devoted countless hours to the development of the issue. Her job was noteworthy of a journeyman editor, not one of a recent college graduate.

We dedicate "A Long Look Back" to all those Black Sacramentans who have contributed much to make this a better place for all of us to live.

The Sacramento Observer

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